

**Testimony of Captain Tom Butler  
on behalf of the Montana Highway Patrol  
before the Senate Highways & Transportation Committee  
on March 24, 2009**

SENATE HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION	
EXHIBIT NO.	13
DATE	3/24/09
BILL NO.	SB329

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the record my name is Tom Butler. I am a Captain with the Montana Highway Patrol currently stationed in Belgrade.

I stand before you today partially in support, partially in opposition, and partially as an informational witness to SB 329. While it is my understanding that if I have any oppositional testimony, I would need to appear in opposition to the bill, but we committed to working through our issues with Senator Barkus so that we can support the bill as amended. To that end and in some deference to the sponsor, I appreciate the committee's flexibility.

In its current version, portions of the bill are a benefit to law enforcement and, others, such as the elimination of the front license plate, are detrimental to law enforcements' ability to effectively perform our public safety mission.

At the outset, I would like to thank Senator Barkus and his willingness to meet and discuss this bill with involved parties and hopefully make changes that will benefit all of us.

Regarding our support of the bill, namely the visible insurance tab portion of this bill, we support this concept. As we heard last week, uninsured motorists in Montana are a significant issue to all of us. We all pay increased insurance premiums to cover the expenses of uninsured motorists involved in crashes. This portion of the bill goes toward increasing compliance of insuring motor vehicles which is a significant benefit to everyone traveling up and down the highways of Montana.

I envision this concept to be enforced in the same manner as registration violations are currently enforced. If the decal is not present on the license plate and is noted by law enforcement, a traffic stop would be initiated to investigate further.

Regarding our opposition to the bill, namely the elimination of the front plate, the Montana Highway Patrol, as well as other law enforcement in this state, heavily rely upon license plates as a means to complete our work.

License plates are used to rapidly identify vehicles and ownership. In two way traffic the license plate on the front of each vehicle presents itself to the officer. As very few cars pass us on the road, regardless of the speed we are traveling, it is the front license plate that officers rely upon.

Most criminals don't back into convenience stores before they rob them or drive away intoxicated. Front license plates allow a whole host of people to gather identifying information of crimes in progress. Nearly every school bus pass with lights activated complaint reported in this state comes with license plate information from a front license plate.

Numerous businesses across the state are utilizing video surveillance to enhance the safety of their business, employees and customers. Having a front license plate doubles the chance of catching identifying information on a vehicle utilized in a crime.

Regarding other portions of the bill, I am available to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you.